CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus for dropping a hockey puck, comprising:

a frame, wherein said frame is moveable;

a power supply, wherein said power supply is carried by said frame;

a puck housing supported by said frame and configured to house said hockey puck;

a feed chute;

a feed mechanism supported by said frame and configured to feed said hockey puck from said puck housing to said feed chute; and

a release mechanism configured to receive said hockey puck from said feed chute and to release said hockey puck, wherein said feed and said release of said hockey puck are powered by said power supply.

2. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said release mechanism is configured to facilitate a leveling of said hockey puck such that said hockey puck is generally horizontal when released.

3. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said release mechanism comprises a puck dropper, wherein said puck dropper is configured to form a vacuum to secure said hockey puck and to destroy said vacuum to release said hockey puck.

4. The apparatus of claim 3, wherein said puck dropper is configured to accelerate said hockey puck by directing air at said hockey puck.

5. The apparatus of claim 3, wherein said release mechanism is configured to center said hockey puck relative to said puck dropper.

6. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said frame includes a stow assembly configured to stow said feed chute.

7. The apparatus of claim 1, further including a plurality of pneumatic actuators, wherein said feed mechanism and said release mechanism include said pneumatic actuators.

8. The apparatus of claim 7, further comprising an air compressor supported by said frame and configured to provide air for said pneumatic actuators.

9. The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising a release rate, wherein the release of said hockey puck is influenced by said release rate.

10. The apparatus of claim 9, wherein said release rate is variable.

11. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said feed chute includes a first end coupled to said frame and a second end coupled to said release mechanism, said feed chute extending laterally away from said frame and sloping generally downward from said first end to said second end.

12. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said release mechanism comprises:

a stopper configured to extend to receive and to facilitate a leveling of said hockey puck; and

a gripper configured to secure said hockey puck while said stopper is extended, wherein said gripper is configured to release said hockey puck at a predetermined interval after said stopper has retracted.

13. An apparatus for dropping a hockey puck, comprising:

a frame;

a puck housing supported by said frame and configured to house said hockey puck;

a feed chute;

a feed mechanism supported by said frame and configured to feed said hockey puck from said puck housing to said feed chute;

a stopper configured to extend to receive said hockey puck from said feed chute and to facilitate a leveling of said hockey puck; and

a gripper configured to secure said hockey puck while said stopper is extended and to release said hockey puck after said stopper has retracted.

14. The apparatus of claim 13, wherein said hockey puck is substantially horizontal when released.

15. The apparatus of claim 13, further comprising a puck dropper, said puck dropper configured to form and destroy a vacuum to receive said hockey puck from said gripper and to release said hockey puck.

16. The apparatus of claim 15, wherein said puck dropper is configured to accelerate said hockey puck by focusing air at said hockey puck.

17. The apparatus of claim 15, wherein said gripper is configured to center said hockey puck relative to said puck dropper.

18. The apparatus of claim 17, wherein said gripper comprises substantially oppositely oriented angled edges configured to extend to center said hockey puck relative to said puck dropper.

19. The apparatus of claim 13, wherein said frame includes a stow assembly configured to stow said feed chute.

20. The apparatus of claim 13, further comprising a plurality of pneumatic actuators, wherein said feed mechanism, said stopper, and said gripper include said pneumatic actuators.

21. The apparatus of claim 20, further comprising an air compressor supported by said frame and configured to provide air for said pneumatic actuators.

22. The apparatus of claim 13, wherein said feed chute extends laterally away from said frame and includes:

a first end for receiving said hockey puck from said puck housing; and

a second end for delivering said hockey puck to said stopper, wherein said feed chute slopes generally downward from said first end to said second end.

23. The apparatus of claim 13, further comprising a power source supported by said frame, said power source configured to provide power for said feed and said release of said hockey puck.

24. The apparatus of claim 13, wherein said hockey puck is released after a predefined interval of time.

25. The apparatus of claim 24, wherein said predefined interval of time is defined by an operator of the apparatus.

26. The apparatus of claim 13, further comprising a plurality of hockey pucks, wherein said puck housing includes said plurality of hockey pucks, and wherein each said hockey puck is released after a predefined interval of time.

27. A method for facilitating practice of a hockey face-off by an individual, comprising:

feeding a hockey puck from a puck housing to a release mechanism;

receiving said hockey puck at said release mechanism, wherein said receiving includes extending a stopper to receive said hockey puck;

leveling said hockey puck at said release mechanism;

securing the said hockey puck, wherein said securing includes extending a gripper to secure said hockey puck; and

retracting said stopper after said securing;

releasing leveled said hockey puck at a predetermined interval after said retracting.

28. The method of claim 27, further comprising accelerating said hockey puck upon said release, wherein said accelerating includes:

securing said puck to a puck dropper; and

extending said puck dropper to accelerate said puck toward a playing surface after said predetermined interval.

29. The method of claim 28, wherein said accelerating further comprises centering said hockey puck relative to said puck dropper.

30. The method of claim 27, further comprising:

forming a vacuum to secure said hockey puck; and

destroying said vacuum to drop said hockey puck toward a generally horizontal surface after said predetermined interval.

31. The method of claim 27, wherein said securing and said releasing are powered by an onboard power supply.